

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson*****The Critical Role of First Responders: Sharing Lessons Learned from Past Attacks***

June 18, 2014 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the full Committee hearing entitled “The Critical Role of First Responders: Sharing Lessons Learned from Past Attacks”:

“I want to recognize the volunteers, first responders, and the citizens affected by the powerful tornadoes that ripped through the small town of Pliger, Nebraska. In a time of catastrophe such as this, the first responder community runs to unsettled and unknown territory while others flee to safety.

I also thank the witnesses for their service and dedication. Chief Schwartz, Deputy Commissioner Miller, and Chief Hooley are gentlemen who deserve commendation for their efforts. I also thank Dr. Jackson for recognizing their efforts in his research. Resilience and response are two of the reasons why almost a decade after September 11th, New York City remains a global powerhouse. Resilience and response are two of the reasons why over 30,000 military and civilian personnel continue to serve at our nation’s defense headquarters in Arlington, Virginia. Resilience and response are two of the reasons why a year after the Boston Marathon bombings, Boston remains strong.

Mr. Chairman, as we rightfully commend today’s panel, it would be a disservice to them not to address one of their main needs which is funding. In April, this Committee held a hearing on the Boston Marathon Bombing. At that hearing, Sergeant Pugliese of the Watertown Police testified that local municipal governments are not financially equipped to take on the increasing burden of catastrophic attacks like Boston.

Last year, at the Committee on Homeland Security’s first hearing on the Boston Marathon Bombings, former Commissioner Davis stated that without grant funding, the “response would have been much less comprehensive than it was” and without the exercises supported through Urban Area Security Initiative funding, “there would be more people who died in those attacks.” And even today, Chief Schwartz is testifying that federal grants serve as an incentive for bringing all agencies together before a terrorist event happens.

Throughout several Congresses, Members have heard about the importance of these grant programs and success stories involving them. Accordingly, I urge Members to oppose the Administration’s proposal to morph the Homeland Security Grant Program into an all-hazards grant. That proposal would shift focus away from supporting State and local efforts to develop terrorism-related prevention and preparedness capabilities. I am not convinced that the Administration’s underfunded grant consolidation proposal would provide sufficient support for first responders across America to build and maintain the capabilities necessary to respond effectively. I cannot support any grant reform proposal until I am convinced that it would provide the support necessary to maintain terrorism-preparedness capabilities we have spent over a decade building.

Also, I agree with the Chairman that we cannot ignore that information sharing between federal, state, and local authorities needs strengthening. Since September 11th, information sharing silos that the 9/11 Commissioners recommended be addressed continue to be exposed after tragic events. We need to work together to develop ways to fix this problem post haste.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, I ask that we continue this conversation with the Department of Homeland Security. We will hear about the challenges first responders have with working with both FEMA and the Office of Intelligence and Analysis. But we need open hearings on what the Department is doing to address these matters. In that forum, we may find ways that we can use our legislative platform to assist both DHS and the first responder community.”

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